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Documenting Ferguson: Capturing History as It Happens

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Documenting Ferguson:
Capturing History as it Happens
Sonya Rooney, University Archivist, and Jennifer Kirmer, Digital Archivist

Formation and Beginnings
- On August 9, 2014, eighteen-year-old Michael Brown was killed by then police officer Darren Wilson in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, Missouri, which sparked a variety of responses including memorials, community meetings, protests, and rallies which dominated the local and national media.
- Later in August, with the direction from Washington University Librarian, Jeffrey Trzeciak, the Documenting Ferguson Team was formed to capture history as it happened.
- Participants were using social media and mobile devices to organize events as well as document them. The team needed to find a way to collect and preserve born digital files captured on these types of temporal media.

Committee Members
- LaTanya Buck (consultant), Director of Center for Diversity & Inclusion
- Rudolph Clay, Head of Library Diversity Initiatives and Outreach Services and African & African American Studies Librarian
- Shannon Davis, Digital Projects Librarian
- Makiha J. Foster, Subject Librarian for American History, American Culture Studies, and Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies
- Meredith Evans, Associate University Librarian
- Chris Freeland, Associate University Librarian
- Nadia Ghasvand, Head of the Visual Media Research Lab
- Jennifer Kirmer, Digital Archivist
- Sonya Rooney, University Archivist
- Andrew Rouner, Director of Scholarly Publishing
- Rebecca Warnos (faculty advisor), Associate Director for The Center of the Humanities
- Meash Zeller, Copyright Librarian

Getting the Word Out
- Variety of venues were used to publicize about and solicit content for Documenting Ferguson
  - Washington University news story
  - St. Louis NPR Interview
  - Missouri History Museum program “Documenting History: Artists Respond to Ferguson”
  - “Documenting Ferguson: Capturing History as it Happens” Archival Outlook November/December 2015 issue

Research and Class Use
- In-person research use of physical posters, fliers, and newspapers
- Spring 2015 Sophomore Seminar group project — students interviewed university staff who live in Ferguson or surrounding communities
  - Interviews contributed to the Community Portal
  - Interviews added to the Washington University Archives Oral History Collection which includes interviews with alums, current/past faculty and staff regarding their experiences at WU

Physical Collection Material
- Collect, preserve, and make accessible physical material documenting the university community’s responses
- Examples of material:
  - Student group fliers and posters
  - Student newspaper articles covering Ferguson
  - Event fliers from university-hosted discussions

Community Portal
- Omeka-powered website with Contribution plugin
- Allows anyone to contribute content
- Terms and conditions to contribute:
  - Contributor must be creator of content
  - Contributor gives university permission to preserve, use, distribute, and reproduce content
  - Content approved by site administrators
- Content includes:
  - Stories; Images; Videos; Audio; Oral Histories

Archive-It
- Collaboration with Archive-It to solicit web content, news stories, blog posts, and social media that documented events in Ferguson
  - Over 100 links contributed directly from the Documenting Ferguson team
  - Web content directly related to Washington University community captured on our own installation
  - Archive-It expanded their collecting to include documentation of events across the country, not only in response to Ferguson, but also other “police-involved” shootings and related protests and events
  - Links to contribute web content are included on the Omeka community portal

Moving Forward
- Continue to:
  - Capture websites through Archive-It
  - Seek contributions to the Community Portal
  - Collect physical material
  - Work with variety of faculty and students to use the collection for teaching and research

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Photos courtesy of the Documenting Ferguson Project, digital.wustl.edu/ferguson